

HR

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<http://www.dop.wa.gov/eap>

■ **I have been documenting my employee's performance issues for a couple of months. I have kept the notes private because I may need them to prove my case that the employee is not suitable for the position. If I share the documentation, will it be more difficult to take action?**

Documentation is first and foremost a communication tool to establish a record of events that have transpired, the employee responses to confrontations, and measures you've instituted to help your employee meet acceptable performance standards. Helping your employee change or improve is what's key. If you construct documentation with no intent to share it with your employee, you risk the appearance of treating it as a diary or personal log where you share emotions or other inappropriate formulations of your observations and private thoughts. These can undermine whatever purpose you plan for the documentation later since your documentation becomes a one-sided presentation. Effective documentation reflects the employee's acknowledgement of your concerns, plans, outlines remedies offered to help the employee make necessary changes and also details follow-up that monitors job performance.

■ **I referred two employees to the EAP because they argue frequently and disrupt the work unit. Things are smooth sailing now, but if problems return, should I refer them to the EAP again or take disciplinary action? How many times should I refer misbehaving employees? When is enough, enough?**

There is no single answer to how many times you should attempt an EAP referral. As a supervisor you must make judgment calls based upon the experience and wisdom you've acquired in your position as well as your Agency policy. Your insistence on change, however, is vital. Frequent follow-up is typically the missing piece to successful outcomes. Reinforce improvement that your employees make and provide regular feedback concerning your expectations. Monitor negative effects their behavior continues to have on the work unit. Workplace conflict between employees is common, but most people respond well to management intervention. Sometimes a structured mediation is valuable. Consultation with an EA Professional may be helpful. Decisions about what to do if the conflict continues or escalates should be made after consulting with appropriate management and HR.

■ **Why would some supervisors ignore their responsibilities under a drug-free workplace policy, even after ample training in signs and symptoms of substance abuse? It appears that some people just won't let go of enabling behaviors. Can you explain such continued willingness to enable?**

There is an old saying in alcohol and drug education: "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." This saying shows that changing perceptions about substance abuse usually involves more than just basic education. False beliefs and misconceptions often have deep roots in the family, or they may be based on misinformation found in professional literature or popular culture. It's a tough assignment to challenge old beliefs about the nature of substance abuse: *What causes it? Who gets it? Why? How it is treated?* and *How is it stopped?* These questions have various answers plus hundreds of years of myths and misconceptions linked to them. There is often a strong need to explain away alcohol and drug problems in ways that reinforce long-held beliefs. Until a new view of addictive illness is acquired, old patterns of enabling tend to remain. When dealing with substance abuse in the workplace, it is essential that supervisors remain focused on observable behaviors and avoid making judgments or diagnosing. Teaching observation and documentation of specific behaviors is vital to promote a drug free workplace. Teaching signs and symptoms as part of workplace alcohol and drug education often creates a desire for additional information. A good place to further explore the complex dynamics of substance abuse is your EAP.

■ **My employee's position will soon be cut because of the budget. The employee is a recovering drug user of less than a month. This is the worst time, I know. If relapse occurs, whose fault is it? Things seem to be going so well with this employee now.**

Almost always, relapses are decisions to discontinue abstaining from substance use. They usually include a failure to participate in recommended tasks or activities that can thwart relapse—or conversely, a failure to avoid activities and tasks that provoke it. No matter what stressful circumstances your employee faces—even receiving news of job layoff—relapse or successful avoidance of it is the individual's responsibility. Many tools, tips, and strategies exist to help recovering persons under stress avoid relapse. It is appropriate to speak to the EAP about your concern, and you may remind your employee about the EAP resource, which is often available even following lay off. You can then let go of this worry because the potential for relapse simply is not within your ability to prevent.

■ **My employee has been absent six days, and our messages to his home have not been returned. Coworkers have seen him in the community. Should we have the EAP phone the employee? We don't think the employee is an EAP client.**

Your EAP does not make this sort of outreach. EA professionals follow a code of ethics, and they also rely upon the established principles of helping professions that most often preclude unsolicited, personal inquiries. Your concern for the employee and the desire to look after him in this way should not overshadow the importance of addressing job performance attendance issues and insisting the employee take responsibility for the consequences of failing to come to work. It is important to consult with HR and follow your agency policies concerning procedures for dealing with this type of absenteeism. It is also appropriate to refer your employee to the EAP based on job performance concerns. The EAP may be able to help the employee deal with underlying personal issues that have led to his attendance problems.

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